Weekly work updates from February 2004 through December 2004 on the restoration of the 1895 lumber schooner *C. A. Thayer* 

June 28 – July 2, 2004

There has been a lot of discussion on the replacement of the stem post.

No one argues that the stem is in good shape. The upper portion of the stem post and the gammon knee at the top were replaced in non-original fashion in the late 1960s. The upper stem post was done in a kind of laminate in three timbers, each perhaps five inches thick, stacked fore and aft. These were attached forward of the rabbet, so that the new structure was actually a false stem. The bottom of this structure was just butted to the old stem post, with the joint covered by a wide chain place for the bobstay. As the thing sits, you can see daylight between the rabbet line and the new false stem. There is obvious rot in the top of the old stem post section. This has been doused with penetrating epoxy, with typical effectiveness – an area of hard plastic surrounded by rot. Externally, the rot goes down about 18 inches.

We can't really tell what is going on with the gammon knee. This is the piece, fixed to the upper portion of the stem post, which forms most of the "clipper bow" effect of the upper stem. Originally, the decorative scrollwork and the rounded "fiddle head" were carved into this piece. Since at least 1969, the upper stem has been covered with one-inch boards to form a false gammon knee. The scrollwork is carved into these boards on each side. We don't know just what is underneath, but likely it is a kluge of timbers pieced together in the approximate shape of the original knee.

All this is not to be overly critical of the work of our predecessors. The 1969 work was done in the water, with a budget which no doubt makes our current situation look lavish. The work was presentable and held up for more than thirty years. Not so shabby.

But we have the opportunity, and likely the obligation, to try to do better. Structurally, we have to do something about the rotten section at the top of the old stem piece. If we try to piece in a new upper stem section, starting where we find sound material in the old lower stem, we will end up with a pitiful four or five foot section of original material, with a pair of scarf joints too close together to make any sense at all. The replacement of the gammon knee, with its decorative scrollwork, might be argued to be largely aesthetic, but in combination with the structurally necessary work on the stem proper, it seems reasonable to go the extra step and get it right. It will make for a somewhat different look, in detail, to the vessel's head.